



Queens Central Democratic Club
Candidate Endorsement Questionnaire 2020
New York's 6th Congressional District

Thank you for applying for the Queens Central Democratic Club (QCDC) endorsement. If you have any questions about this document or the endorsement process, feel free to email us at qcdcny@gmail.com. Please email us the completed questionnaire by Sunday May 17th.

Full Name: Melquiades Gagarin

1. What is the single most important issue to you as a candidate for federal office? Why?

I believe income inequality is at the root of our divided country and politics, and my platform aims to address this inequity. However, the Covid-19 crisis has brought to the fore, the need for true universal single-payer healthcare. Medicare for All is my top legislative priority. In the 1970s, when other countries around the world had long implemented or were implementing national health insurance plans, we put our health in the hands of private enterprise. Decades and billions of lobbying dollars later, the results are clear: the United States spends far more on healthcare than any other nation, with significantly worse outcomes — including the highest maternal mortality rate in the developed world.

With a single-payer program, all residents of the United States will be covered for their medical services, including, preventive, long-term care, mental health, reproductive health care, prescription drug, and medical supply costs. Eliminating co-pays, premiums, and deductibles mean that everyday Americans will no longer have to weigh the cost of paying for life-saving medicine against feeding their families. Reproductive justice policies must also be included in Medicare for All, ensuring that no-cost services of contraception, STI prevention, abortion, pre-natal and post-natal care are offered to all communities.

Solving the COVID-19 crisis requires the coordinated implementation of several federal programs, including a single-payer national program. Until we can elect enough candidates to lead on these issues, healthcare for everyday Americans will continue to be an unaffordable privilege.

2. What endorsements do you have from elected officials, political organizations, unions and community leaders?

The People for Bernie, New York Progressive Action Network (NYPAN), Brand New Congress, Queens United Independent Progressives (QUIP), Income Movement, Forward Thinking



Democracy, Our Progressive Future, Demand Universal Healthcare (DUH!), and American Progressives in STEM.

3. What is your vision for how the federal government should respond to the COVID-19 crisis?

This answer focuses on the legislative response given current realities, versus what the overall coordinated federal response should be where we focus on mitigation, eradication, and inoculation. In the short term, the federal government must extend a national stay at home order to contain the spread of the virus, provide regular emergency UBI payments of at least \$2,000 per adult (including tax-paying immigrants) without means testing, and cancel all rents and mortgages throughout the duration of the lockdown. Pandemic Unemployment Assistance must be extended in the form of covering worker salaries for non-essential workers affected by the crisis, hazard pay for all front-line workers and Democrats must fight for true Medicare for All. These policies are long overdue, but are now required to even begin addressing this global pandemic. A national cancellation of student debt will also provide an economic stimulus for an entire generation and correspondingly increase consumer spending.

At this juncture, the focus must be on providing relief to individuals and true small business owners — not corporations. We should be focusing on stand alone legislation to address the ever changing contours of this crisis rather than packages tied to corporate bailouts that disproportionately benefit corporations in both the short and long term. If we do not, income inequality will only be further exacerbated and the history of the 2008 financial crisis will repeat itself. Congress must develop measures to ensure strict oversight, especially as this administration continues to enrich itself and its friends with public dollars, and doing everything in its power to undercut meaningful oversight.

In the long-term, we must create policy infrastructure to support a federal jobs guarantee. This infrastructure is necessary in order to address the inevitable economic crisis that will follow this pandemic. Simultaneously, the mental health crisis that exists in America will undoubtedly compound due to the quarantine as well as the trauma faced by front-line workers, survivors, and those who have lost loved ones to this pandemic. As we race towards a vaccine, we must ensure funding is available for production, provide strict oversight of safety, and implement an outreach strategy that will distribute a successful vaccine to all. We must also ensure that our national health agencies are properly staffed and funded, and that states and municipalities are afforded appropriate funding to ensure their healthcare systems can sustain the next pandemic.



4. What has the COVID-19 crisis revealed to you about the condition of the American social safety net?

The crisis has revealed what progressives have been arguing for years: that our social safety net has been weakened to the point it cannot meet the needs of working class folks. The American social safety net must be modernized to adequately prepare for today's realities, including COVID-19. I'll work to legislate living wage standards and to expand the social safety net to fill in the current gaps between Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security. Additionally, federal investment in Universal Basic Income policies can finally value the work of unrecognized labor such as parenthood.

Growing up in Queens, I've seen firsthand how elders are robbed of their respect and dignity in their golden years because of their or their family's circumstances. Elders who are retired should not be priced out of their homes or be unable to afford long-term quality healthcare. In Congress, I'll introduce a "Golden Years Security" Act. Golden Years will make sure that the basic needs of our elders are met: from preventing discrimination of LGBTQIA+ elders in nursing facilities to addressing the specialized medical needs that our current infrastructure fails to. The Golden Years Security Act will also subsidize and expand home care services, increase the number of union nurses and caretakers, provide resources to train caretakers, meet the challenges of end-of-life care, and help families that must choose assisted living facilities.

Finally, means testing support for those in need has shown that the social safety net has not kept up with the true cost of living, and neither have wages, which leave many out of receiving the support they need during this crisis.

5. How has the COVID-19 crisis affected your views on the state of health care in the country and in Queens?

Ten years ago, though I was a supporter of single payer healthcare, I supported the Affordable Care Act because I believed it would drastically improve the state of healthcare in the country. But since then, Republicans have successfully torn apart the ACA and have actually managed to increase the number of Americans without coverage. Now with over 30 million unemployment claims in the country, the massive layoffs due to COVID-19 are resulting in an estimated 27 million people losing employer-based coverage.

Along with the fall of the ACA, the front line of Queens is dealing with an overstretched healthcare system and the ineffectiveness of elected officials who did not prepare earlier on. These frontline workers are risking their lives to keep the country safe and deserve more than simple praise. A strong labor movement supported working families like mine and is needed to support all families. For workers in hospitals and workers everywhere else, I'll fight to



strengthen worker protections, to allow workers to organize in their workplace, and to ensure the needs of all workers are met.

The time for trial and error is long gone. Now more than ever, we need leaders in government who will ensure that the healthcare system in Queens, and in this nation, is robust enough to handle current and future crises. We need Medicare for All.

6. Do you support a single-payer healthcare system? What would your ideal healthcare system look like?

I support Medicare for All — a federal universal single-payer program. It's time for elected leaders to invest in the American people and their health, instead of protecting the profits of billion-dollar corporations.

With a single-payer program, all residents of the United States will be covered for their medical services, including, preventive, long-term care, mental health, reproductive health care, prescription drug, and medical supply costs. Eliminating co-pays, premiums, and deductibles mean that everyday Americans will no longer have to weigh the cost of paying for life-saving medicine against feeding their families.

7. What is your vision for addressing the housing crisis in the country and in Queens?

While an improving economy has benefited real estate and land development corporations, wages have not kept up with rising housing prices and rent. As a result, countless working families are being priced out of their neighborhoods and the number of people experiencing homelessness continues to increase.

By building upon recommendations of the People's Policy Project and The People's Action Homes Guarantee, I will introduce legislation to create millions of new social housing units by 2050. This comprehensive plan aims to meet the sustainability goals of the Green New Deal, create new jobs that pay prevailing wages, desegregate poverty, eliminate re-entry barriers for formerly incarcerated people, and create housing that is affordable to all.

8. What is your vision for addressing climate change in the country and in Queens?

I believe that a Green New Deal is necessary to address climate change and restructure our economy to meet the urgency of the climate crisis. But the Green New Deal in and of itself is just a framework and we must move quickly to create legislation that actualizes these climate goals. For instance, I support the Green New Deal for Public Housing introduced by Rep. Ocasio-Cortez and informed by housing advocates and frontline communities closest to the problem. I support increased funding for infrastructure and transportation to allow municipalities like New York to



meet carbon reduction targets. Right here in Queens, significant federal investment can make roads like Queens Boulevard safer for pedestrians and those who ride bicycles, while making transportation safer, accessible, and reliable to reduce the number of vehicles on the road.

In this race, I am the only candidate to pledge to reject contributions from fossil fuel executives, lobbyists, and their front groups.

I support a Green New Deal that ends fossil fuel and begins an immediate transition into 100% renewable energy. This includes support for Public Power, democratizing our energy grid. As an elected, I will fight to ban fracking, to suspend new fossil fuel infrastructure, to remove federal tax breaks for fossil fuel companies, and to severely restrict drilling in our natural environments. Climate solutions in the Sixth Congressional District will expand upon progressive legislative agendas by implementing the following on a federal level: subsidies and tax cuts for alternative energy sources, investment into renewable energy funds, and supporting local supply-chain manufacturers. In the district, we will create pipelines for local hires, ensuring there is a well-trained and well-prepared public sector workforce for implementation and oversight of Green New Deal projects. This would also require massive investment to upgrade local infrastructure, improve public transportation, and reduce the number of vehicles on the road.

Frontline communities have also disproportionately carried the burdens of the climate crisis, whether that be living in proximity to toxin and waste, paying for the tax cuts enjoyed by the fossil fuel industry, or having millions of jobs at the mercy of a few corporations. If elected, I will fight to ensure Green New Deal projects prioritize those communities when offering great union jobs with prevailing wages, training opportunities, or access to new affordable housing units.

Finally, while most would not consider foreign policy to fall under the purview of the environment, the reality is that our military has a bigger carbon footprint than the entirety of other developed nations. We must work to address American militarism, cut our defense budget, and prioritize addressing the climate over expanding our military.

9. Should the federal government raise taxes on the rich? How high should these be?

Absolutely. We need to introduce a tax on the extreme wealth on the top 0.1% of U.S. households. I would vote for either Bernie Sanders' or Elizabeth Warren's visions for wealth taxes, but would be willing to introduce legislation that would add a wealth tax of 2% after the first \$30 million dollars (Warren calls for this tax after the first \$50 Million; Bernie calls for a wealth tax after \$32 million).

10. Should the federal government raise the federal minimum wage? How high should it be?

I support the Raise the Wage Act and the Fight for \$15. Specifically, I believe that the federal minimum wage must be set to the regional cost of living and matched to inflation.



11. Please identify a time when you have disagreed with the national Democratic Party. What did/would you do to work through this disagreement?

Were my issues with the Democratic Party and the incumbent singular, I wouldn't be running in this race. Elections, and primaries in particular, are opportunities to make our arguments and change the party for the better. For the past three decades, and compounded by the Supreme Court's disastrous decision in Citizens United and influx of corporate money into campaign coffers, the Democratic party has embraced a neoliberal ideology that even Pete Buttigieg, at the outset of his campaign decried. That ideology led to policy decisions that helped bake in income inequity and lay down the groundwork that got us Trump in the first place.

As someone who came up in traditional Democratic politics, I'd love nothing more than for Trump to be an anomaly, but he's the natural result of a broken political and economic system that has left out the voices and needs of the working and middle class. When we see how far the right has gone, it would be naive to presume that eliminating Trump will bring things back to "normal" and that Republicans will now start to work with Democrats on policies that uplift marginalized communities, workers, and immigrants.

My opponent voted to weaken Dodd-Frank in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, in the face of another economic crisis, that lack of regulation can and will be exploited by Wall Street, not out of malevolent intent, but because their objective is to maximize profit, not ensure the public good. My opponent continues to take money from the military industrial complex, voted against the Iran Deal during the Obama years, and recently partnered with Rep. Joe Wilson (R) to deploy an Iron Dome missile defense against Iran, which will only further tensions exacerbated by Trump. If we want to protect our troops in Iraq, the best thing we can do is bring them home, and fight to get the Iran Deal back on track.

Some may wave away these votes as necessary compromises to "get things done," and I would argue that it's that line of thinking that has gotten us to a point where in the midst of a national healthcare crisis, rising deaths, and rising uninsured national leaders still continue to oppose universal single-payer healthcare but no one bats an eye when the Fed pumps 1.5 trillion dollars to shore up banks. We have become a party where we morph policy decisions to meet the electorate and get through the next election, rather than actually fighting and making the case for wise policies that meet desired policy outcomes.

I became a Democrat because I believed it was the party that cared about a strong federal government that would work for the public good. In the intervening years it's become clear to me that the party and some of its members have forgotten that politics isn't the end game. That we must take unpopular positions in order to fight for those least among us.

When I see my opponent vote for bills with Republicans, that even Nancy Pelosi has voted against, it tells me that these lessons haven't been learned yet. That compromise has its place in the legislative process, but not when the resulting legislation serves ulterior motives, or fails to



undo real harms. There is nothing I'd love more than to wax poetic here about the need to heal our politics. But so long as the wounds of the middle class remain unhealed, our politics needs strong actual progressives who are willing to articulate specific policy proposals that benefit those most in need, with a commitment to work with those closest to the problem and give average everyday people a voice on the hill and not the K Street lobbyists whose influence currently outweighs the will of the voters.

12. Why are you uniquely qualified to represent us in Congress?

I'm a stay-at-home dad, a renter, a community advocate, and a progressive candidate who was born in Elmhurst to a Puerto- Rican mother and a Filipino immigrant father. I was raised by my mom — a single parent and 1199SEIU nurse — and my abuela in a one-bedroom apartment. My lived experiences here inspire me to fight for working people, families, and immigrants across the district.

My entire career has been dedicated to advancing the causes of social justice and addressing inequity, particularly those faced by marginalized communities. Before becoming a stay at home dad, I led the policy department at College and Community Fellowship working to eliminate barriers to higher education for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. There, I worked alongside impacted individuals, activists and other stakeholders to eliminate the box on SUNY admissions forms, get the Obama DOE to roll out the Pell Pilot Program for incarcerated students, and see the issuance of national guidance to eliminate the box from the college admissions process. We also saw the introduction of the REAL Act in both houses of Congress that would undo the harm of the '94 Crime Bill which restricted incarcerated students from Pell Grants.

Additionally, I have worked as a Congressional Aide, representing parts of this district and have helped advance gender, racial, and economic justice at organizations such as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Planned Parenthood of New York City.